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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2233
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9255
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7510
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5350
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3666
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5275
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0136
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0808
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4397
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9817
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7106
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0131
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3973
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000008

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SUBJECT: CAMPAIGN STRATEGIST SAYS FONSEKA WANTS TRUTH AND
RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

COLOMBO 00000008 001.8 OF 003

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA A. BUTENIS. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting with Ambassador, chief opposition campaign strategist and one-time Rajapaksa confidante Mangala Samaraweera said he was "pleasantly surprised" that General Fonseka believed accountability was important for Sri Lanka, that he agreed with Samaraweera that the country needed a truth and reconciliation process, and that he had ordered the campaign to start working out the logistics of a truth and reconciliation commission. Samaraweera was "increasingly optimistic" about the Fonseka campaign, noting opposition polls showing the general's numbers increasing from 43 percent just after nomination in mid-December to 52 percent now. But Samaraweera was worried about rising violence of pro-government thugs and suggested the president was not above ordering Fonseka's assassination or even wounding himself to gain public sympathy. If Fonseka won, the general had made clear he wanted to remain chairman of the security council and wanted to oversee the re-organization of the armed forces. Samaraweera was not concerned about the general reneging on his promises about abolition of the executive presidency and establishing a military dictatorship. Indeed, Samaraweera argued it was the Fonseka campaign that had brought questions of democracy and minority rights to the center of the presidential race, supplanting the war triumphalism and budding "national socialism" of the Rajapaksas. END SUMMARY.

RAJAPAKSA'S BRAIN ABANDONS HIM

12. (C) If General Fonseka was the heart of the Sri Lankan war effort that "betrayed" the president, Mangala Samaraweera was the Rajapaksa campaign brain that also deserted him. Having a long history with the president's SLFP, Samaraweera was a close confidante of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the architect of Rajapaksa's successful 2005 presidential

campaign, and the GSL foreign minister during the first year and a half of the Rajapaksa government. He lost his position as FM to Bogollagama when the latter crossed over from the UNP, and Samaraweera soon broke with the Rajapaksas to form his own party, the SLFP (Mahajana Wing). Samaraweera is now the strategic architect of the campaign of joint opposition candidate Fonseka.

CAMPAIGN VIOLENCE, FONSEKA SECURITY BIGGEST WORRIES

13. (C) Samaraweera said he was "increasingly optimistic" about the Fonseka campaign, noting opposition polls showing the general's numbers increasing from 43 percent just after nomination in mid-December to 52 percent now. He claimed that polls by GSL domestic intelligence were similarly showing a 51-Fonseka/49 Rajapaksa breakdown. This was most surprising in the north and east, where the opposition had not expected to do so well. At the same time, however, Samaraweera said he was worried about campaign violence and intimidation -- that is, attacks by pro-government thugs on opposition rallies and offices -- which were quickly escalating, including in his home district of Mahara in the south. He expected the situation to get worse as election day approached, though he thought the violence was back-firing on the Rajapaksas by turning people against them.

14. (C) He also expressed concern about Fonseka's personal safety, noting that he knew Mahinda Rajapaksa intimately and would not put it past him to facilitate an assassination attempt on Fonseka if the campaign increasingly went in the general's favor. Given Rajapaksa's penchant for high drama

COLOMBO 00000008 002.4 OF 003

and theatrics, he also thought the president was not above shooting himself then publishing photos of his wounds and blood to gain sympathy as a victim of alleged opposition violence. If these or other such scenarios led the opposition to believe the election was stolen, Samaraweera said they would object strongly and the JVP would likely take to the streets. But he did not believe this reaction would push Sri Lanka to its own Orange Revolution, as in Ukraine. Sri Lankans were "too laid-back," and the Buddhist belief in karma would make them accept even a stolen election as what was "meant to be."

IF FONSEKA WON

15. (C) Samaraweera said that in the event of a Fonseka victory, the general would not be content to assume a figure-head role after the abolition of the executive presidency in line with opposition campaign promises. He had made clear that he wanted to remain chairman of the security council and wanted to oversee the re-organization of the armed forces. Samaraweera said he was not concerned, however, about the general reneging on his promises about abolition of the executive presidency and establishing a military dictatorship once in office. The UNP and JVP already had been working hard against the Rajapaksa dictatorship, and the whole thrust of the Fonseka campaign was against the "national socialism" that raised its ugly head at the end of the war. Samaraweera claimed that Fonseka was chosen by the opposition as one of the original war icons purposefully to arrest this development and, indeed, the campaign had brought questions of democracy and minority rights to the center of the presidential race, supplanting the war triumphalism the Rajapaksas preferred.

RECONCILIATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

16. (C) Samaraweera had no faith in the Rajapaksas to address meaningfully the questions of national reconciliation and accountability, despite their great importance for the health

and future of Sri Lanka. Mahinda Rajapaksa was "not so bad," but his family (that is, brothers Gotabhaya and Basil) had made him a prisoner of the worst racist and chauvinist elements in society. Mahinda himself also was firmly opposed to any devolution of power and had argued in closed government meetings that he wanted Sri Lanka to be a "unitary" not just a "united" country.

17. (C) Fonseka, on the other hand, had made reconciliation and accountability centerpieces of his campaign. Samaraweera noted the 10-point plan the general had just signed with the TNA leader Sampanthan on political rights and economic re-development of the war-affected areas. He also said Fonseka had been "surprising me with his liberalism" and noted that the general himself had come up with the idea of ensuring freedom of religious belief under a new regime. On the very sensitive issue of accountability, Samaraweera again said he was "pleasantly surprised" that Fonseka believed accountability was important for Sri Lanka, agreed with Samaraweera that the country needed a truth and reconciliation process, like the South Africans, and had ordered the campaign to start working out the logistics of a truth and reconciliation commission. Samaraweera thought that if Fonseka won, the Rajapaksas would be marginalized in the SLFP and the SLFP mainstream would want to work with the new government on reconciliation and accountability.

COMMENT

COLOMBO 00000008 003.4 OF 003

18. (C) Mangala Samaraweera's defection to the opposition is old news, but it is only now that it is probably causing the greatest heartburn for the Rajapaksas. With his intimate knowledge of Mahinda Rajapaksa's thinking and methods, Samaraweera is as much of a danger to them in the presidential campaign as "traitor" General Fonseka. The key to this appears to be Rajapaksa's rigidity and fear of alienating his base. While known as a masterful campaigner and the king of divide and conquer, Rajapaksa has offered no new significant initiatives during the campaign and has done little to reach out to Tamils other than to kiss their babies. Fonseka, on the other hand -- presumably under the guidance of Samaraweera and Ranil Wickramasinghe -- has re-invented himself, dramatically reached out to the minorities, and promised great reforms for Sri Lanka.

19. (C) We assume that at least some of Samaraweera's claims about Fonseka's "liberalism" are exaggerated and meant to impress us. Nevertheless, the general and his agents are making promises that it would be hard for them to walk back. The 10-point program signed with TNA leader Sampanthan would radically alter the government's relationship with Tamils and would represent a major step toward national reconciliation. Similarly, their telling us about their plans for a truth and reconciliation commission -- though not announced publicly -- puts them on the hook with the international community. The next few weeks will tell whether this strategy is a winner, but in the meantime it has breathed new life into Sri Lankan politics and brought issues to the fore that had been all but buried.

BUTENIS